

On The Shelves: What's Happening at the Vernonia Library

By Nancy Burch

A citizen recently asked the reason for Vernonia's library not having a procedure for obtaining materials by Interlibrary Loan. I was caught off guard by the question because it has been addressed over the years, but evidently not recently, so even though the bottom line involves \$\$\$\$, the historical background concerning the situation might be in order at this time. The Oregon State Library originally served as a "big brother" to areas with limited library services by providing materials and reference service including "traveling libraries" (groups of books that traveled from one library to another). They became sort of a clearing-house for interlibrary loans allowing libraries to make written requests for materials from any library in the United States and filling those requests. Shortly after I was hired in 1988, the State Library gave libraries the opportunity to receive computers with which they could make requests for materials from other libraries. This was a rather interesting process because at that time the library had no telephone line of its own and, of course, we in Vernonia were just being introduced to Internet--dial-up Internet, only. The other interesting fact for that year was that since

we had not previously budgeted for a phone line which cost \$500.00 a year, our book budget was reduced by that amount (\$500.00), making it \$1,000.00 for the year. (It was quite a scramble to find books-- many of them used paperbacks to provide reading material for the public that year.)

In 1991, the roles and mission of the State Library were re-examined. Because most libraries in Oregon had become part of some kind of co-operative or district within which they could exchange materials, the State Library made the decision to de-emphasize backup services to local libraries and end service to the unserved. When the librarians of Columbia County heard that the state would no longer be facilitating loans to libraries after July 1, 1993, we met to try to find an alternative way to provide this service to our patrons. A possible solution centered on having one library join a Northwest database with all five libraries sharing the expense, with the patrons making these requests paying the telecommunication and postage costs involved. This did not happen when it was determined that this cost would be prohibitive to our library patrons.

At that time, none of the county libraries had been automated and it was determined that this would be absolutely

necessary before any sharing of materials county-wide could be considered. A grant to automate all five libraries was prepared with the Longview Public Library agreeing to use their resources to greatly supplement the combined holdings of Columbia County libraries. This grant was not approved. During this time, we also met with Washington County regarding sharing their library resources and though they were willing, the bottom line was that "we would not be able to afford it."

A feasibility study took place in 2004 and 2005 to determine the possibility of Clatsop and Columbia Counties forming a two-county district. At that time, we had just completed our new library and were the only facility with the State-recommended square footage for our community. When this study was presented to Vernonia's City Council, they and the public voiced concerns ranging from loss of local control, loss of local private collections, loss of tax dollars to the City's general fund, the makeup of a district board, the cost to property owners, and fear that Vernonia dollars would end up elsewhere. The bottom line to this extensive and expensive study was that the communities involved said, "No thanks!"

So, here we are!! Each library in Columbia County has now automated its collections, but with different software. Scappoose and Clatskanie have library districts that correspond to their school districts, while Rainier, St. Helens and Vernonia have city libraries and charge user fees to out-of-town patrons. Most libraries will loan materials to another library if a request is made for an item in their collection. This involves postage fees, at the very least. When

patrons make requests here in Vernonia, the significance of adding that particular item to our collection is evaluated and if it is determined that the likelihood of other patrons also wanting that item is high, and if budget permits, that item is purchased and added to our collection. If a request is made for something very expensive or so obscure that the chance of anyone else ever using that particular item is miniscule, it probably will not be purchased. We do the very best we can to fill patrons' requests within the yearly budget constraints. Be sure and ask. We'll do the best we can to fill your request and if a way for our library to efficiently and economically participate in interlibrary loan is found, we will certainly offer it to our patrons.

Upcoming library events for May 2010 are as follows:

Saturday, May 22 at 2:00 P.M.-- Movie Matinee with *Curious George II: Follow that Monkey* to be shown.

Monday, May 24 at 5:30 P.M.-- Book Discussion with *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* by Mary Ann Shaffer being the topic for the evening.

Thursday, May 27 at 6:30 P.M.-- Mature Movie Night with *The Bucket List* starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman to be shown.

Ballots for Oregon's Primary Election may be dropped at the library until 8:00 P.M., Tuesday, May 18-- any time the library is open, from 12-8 P.M. on May 18.

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